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BURMA: OPENING ON THE LEFT IN THE MILITARY MANNER

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A few years ago when Burma was aimlessly drifting under U Nu's blissful and benign mismanagement, people of earnest intent felt that a period of army rule might just possibly rally the Burmese people and give them a renewed sense of purpose. When General Ne Win, in a not quite bloodless coup, established his second regime, well-wishers of Burmese democracy heralded the dramatic and apparently decisive act as signalling the end of an ominous drift toward communism.

Yet now, after less than two years of stern, but hardly competent, army rule, Burma appears to be closer than ever to becoming an authoritarian socialist society hobbled by special relations to Communist China. The General and his colonels who were supposed to reverse the course of development seem only to have accelerated Burma's exodus from the modern world by isolating the country from the West more than it has ever been for the last hundred years and giving it the closest relations it has had in modern times with China. Should the current trends continue for much longer, Burma will find herself again, as in ancient times, entangled in a suzerain relationship with China.

Burmese political behavior is usually the cause of wonderment and perplexity to all who would go beyond the superficial. Repeatedly the Burmese have puzzled, and also to a degree exasperated,

their friends by approaching the very verge of accomplishment and success and then darting off towards failure and helplessness. In all fairness it must be added that the Burmese are equally accomplished in recovering serenely their equilibrium after teetering on the brink of national disaster. However, in spite of the general rule that the Burmese are predictably perplexing, the recent conduct of the Ne Win government is certainly the cause for more than usual puzzlement.

Unfortunately this is also a time when it is a more than ordinarily difficult task to learn the facts, to say nothing of the dynamics of Burmese political behavior. Burma has been steadily withdrawing from the world and contacts between Burmese and Westerners have become rare and also pathetically superficial. There was considerable shock among both diplomats and specialists in economic development when General Ne Win ordered the Ford and Asia Foundations to cease their generous and beneficial assistance to Burma. The significance of the ouster orders only became fully apparent after the government had also ended the English language training courses of the British Council, placed restraints on USIS activities, terminated the Fulbright educational exchange program, refused visas to American graduate students interested in field work. It is not just the Americans and British who are being treated in a cold and distant manner, for even the Israelis and U.N. representatives have been cold-shouldered.

The severance of old ties with the West, the rise of authoritarianism, the persisting move toward the left, and the appearance

of a distrusting, suspicious, and, in a sense, deeply ugly mood in public affairs are all legitimate causes for distress and anxiety among not just the old friends of Burma but all who are concerned with the cause of freedom in the newly independent countries. A decade and a half ago, when Burma regained her independence her leaders contributed as much as those of any of the new countries to the image of colonial lands being sincerely committed to democratic development, representative institutions, vigorous economic growth, and a respect for the public wellbeing of all citizens. And during the first years of independence the gallant way in which the Burmese overcame innumerable crises and setbacks provided considerable substance for this hopeful vision of the destinies of the new countries. It is true that much of this image of the new states was not fully deserved, for it was created in large measure not by the record of performance of new leaders but rather by their skill in using, as mere words and propaganda, the concepts and schemes that are at the heart of the Western liberal democratic tradition. The Burmese, however, were possibly less guilty than most others of such word-playing, and certainly during those trying years they repeatedly demonstrated a strong commitment to the principle of a rule of law.

A change has come about in that once happy land: at this moment the entire legally constituted civilian cabinet languishes in durance. The military rulers profess generosity by pleading their readiness to release U Nu if he will only give up his legal rights and turn

that American policy is excessively sensitive to sentimentalities ought to reflect on how quickly we are able to put out of mind those we have wooed once they have lost power.

There are a variety of explanations which may account for the increasingly disturbing trends in Burmese public life. We can only attempt here to single out a few of the important strands in the complex story.

It is necessary in the beginning to acknowledge that the shift toward the left is in some measure a direct consequence of Chinese policies. Since the rise in Communist influence in underdeveloped countries is almost universally linked to deteriorating domestic social conditions, it is difficult for sophisticated observers to believe that the foreign policies of Russia or China can in fact have a significant influence, yet there are times when profound sociological and economic interpretations should give way to a simple recounting of rational strategies and policy plays.

On December 16, 1949, Burma hoped to gain security from its aggressively revolutionary neighbor by being the first non-Communist country to recognize the Peking regime when it came to power in the mainland. Indeed, all Burmese groups professing Marxist orientations publicly proclaimed their wide-eyed enthusiasm at being next door to a Communist revolution. Within U Nu's government there was, however, a sense of uneasiness, particularly after the Burmese Communist Party challenged the new government with an

armed insurrection. Suddenly hounded by a variety of insurrections, the inexperienced government sought to win back the Communist insurgents by pleading that ideologically there was no difference between them.

In these first confrontations with Communists, U Nu committed himself to an approach which proved disastrous, but the failure of which seemed only to spur U Nu to a deeper commitment to it. When faced with a menacing danger, U Nu desperately sought to avoid at all costs any act which might be interpreted as provocative. This approach was less a matter of policy than of basic style which seems to have been deeply rooted in the serene statesman's basic outlook on life. Throughout his political career U Nu consistently treated his political foes as though their natures consisted of contending, and delicately balanced, forces of good and evil. Shrewdness, if not morality, demanded, therefore, that he appeal to their good side while carefully avoiding anything which might stir up their evil qualities.

It soon became apparent that this approach only egged the domestic Burmese Communists on to redouble their efforts in the expectation that they could exploit U Nu's weaknesses and innocence. It took longer for the limitations of the approach to become manifest with respect to Communist China. For one thing the Chinese were absorbed first with their internal revolution and then with the Korean War. During this period the Chinese in large measure ignored the Burmese, showing them no special favor for having so

readily recognized their regime; and the U Nu government in return convinced itself that its non-provocative approach was paying off, at least to the extent of making their country inconspicuous to the Chinese.

Not until the end of the Korean War did the Chinese adopt a coherent and active approach to Burma. At this same time American policy also became more vigorous in Southeast Asia, and so the Burmese were presented with a vivid contrast between the approaches of the two sides in the cold war. The United States carried along by the momentum of our Korean War policies was aggressively seeking Asian friends and striving to isolate the Chinese Communists. At the time American officials were also highly sensitive to the "Ugly American" criticism of our performance in Asia. Consequently they anxiously sought to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to court and win Burmese. Indeed, during the late fifties during the ambassadorship of Walter McConaghey, American policy reached a point where it appeared to be nearly devoid of all content except for a frantic effort to engage any and all Burmese in friendly but idle conversations. Members of the Embassy staff were engaged in what seemed to be vigorous competitions over extending and receiving social invitations with Burmese.

In contrast to the open but essentially empty friendliness of the Americans, the Chinese Communist approach was aggressive, mysterious, menacing, and above all bullying. The Chinese embassy,

located behind a high wall and under the command of a general, seemed to want to cut itself off from any unnecessary association with Burmese. The large staff, which constantly danced in and out of the mysterious recesses of the embassy compound seemed much too busy and far too preoccupied with more serious matters to have any time for the Burmese.

The aloofness of the Chinese made them frightening, for it seemed that there was little the Burmese could do to bring about a response in the Chinese, and thence there was no way for the Burmese to try to control or influence the Chinese. The Burmese could only try to become even less provocative. Under these pressures from their apparently powerful and certainly massive northern neighbor, the Burmese were able to maintain a sense of equilibrium only by balancing their urge not to be provocative toward the Chinese with a readiness to be cold and a bit provocative toward the eternally friendly Americans.

The Chinese, unconcerned about Burmese opinions, concentrated their energies on building their power base in the country and on generally proving their superiority. During the late fifties the Chinese were constantly looking for issues on which to challenge the Burmese in such a manner as to force them to prove that under no conditions would they act in a provocative and unfriendly manner toward Chinese power. The approach was that of the bully on the playground who constantly strikes the younger child, saying "That

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didn't hurt did it? We are still friends, aren't we? You're not going to squeal, are you?"

Numerous examples could be cited of the way in which the Chinese conducted their war of nerves. When a movie was shown in Rangoon which contained some critical commentary about Communist China, the Chinese embassy first publicly informed the Burmese press that the ~~evening~~ showing would not go on and the film would have to be banned. It then instructed the Burmese foreign office that the government would have to close down the movie unless it wanted to bear the full consequences of a hostile act against the Chinese People's Republic. In spite of some remarks in the Burmese press to the effect that Burma was a sovereign government, the movie was not shown again in Burma. In another case, the Chinese embassy announced to the Rangoon press that the Burmese government would not issue visas to a soccer football team from Hong Kong which was scheduled to play a championship Burmese team after completing an extensive tour of India because two of the players were said to have once played with a Chinese Nationalist team. The Burmese press and even the Director of Immigration loudly protested that such decisions lay entirely within the jurisdiction of the Burmese government and that the Chinese should not be telling the Burmese government what it should or should not do. After carefully encouraging the Burmese press to make all manner of bold and heroic statements the Chinese informed the Foreign Office that if the Hong Kong players were permitted to enter the country

Peking would assume that the Burmese government had chosen to terminate its policy of friendship with China. The Director of Immigration was thereupon ordered to refuse entry to the team.

American officials felt at the time that the contrast in our approach and our alert sensitivity to Burmese sensibilities should help us to build up considerable capital with the Burmese which we could hope to draw upon in relation to matters of serious import. Privately it was possible for Americans to commiserate with individual Burmese over how boorish and crude the Chinese were. Regretfully such expressions of sympathy in no way affected the realities of power relations. Indeed, some observers felt they only served to accentuate the impotence of the United States.

The prime objective of the Chinese seems to have been to press upon the Burmese leaders the overriding need to always take the presumed views of Peking into account whenever making any decisions. By forcing the Burmese to feel that they had to ask themselves at every turn, "What will Peking think of our action?" the Chinese were effectively establishing the classic relationship of a big power with a weak regime. In time the Chinese could expect that their ambassador in Rangoon would play the same kind of role as the British Ambassador, for example, used to play in the various sheikdoms along the Persian Gulf.

The degree to which the Chinese were succeeding in establishing such a special relationship was dramatically demonstrated shortly after the Burmese Army first assumed the reins of government in the fall of 1958. Beseiged by all the problems of a disintegrating society, the army officers decided that they would wage a campaign against what they termed "economic insurgents," by whom they meant those merchants they felt to be hoarding goods and thus causing inflationary pressures. According to the "non-capitalistic" economic theories of these officers, whenever supply exceeded demand prices were bound to go up because of the prima facie evidence of hoarding under such conditions. Acting upon their theories the Burmese army instituted a menacing campaign of sealing off commercial areas of Rangoon and systematically examining the stocks of the shops. No effort was made to hide the dramatic fact that in the entire operation not a single Chinese shop was interfered with, while Indian and Burmese establishments had to undergo at the least considerable indignities and at the most the arrest of their owners or managers.

The Chinese community in Rangoon interpreted the special treatment it received from the Burmese government as being a direct product of the firm and aggressive policies of the Chinese embassy. A Chinese businessman with no Marxian illusions, who was aware that I had once lived in China under the conditions of extraterritoriality, explained to me the sensation of well-

being he received from knowing that he was fully protected by a powerful embassy by saying, "The Burmese would never dare arrest me because of what the Chinese embassy would do; they could, however, arrest you because the American embassy would not be able to protect you."

In spite of the dramatic setbacks in Chinese development which have followed on the failure of the "great leap" program, Peking has maintained its approach of mixing bullying and blandishments in the treatment of Burma. At one moment the Chinese seek to remind the Burmese of how weak and small they are in comparison with the massive weight of China; and at the next moment the Chinese hold out the exciting prospect that Burma can find a new and spectacular place in the world through special relations with China. For example, it is reported that during the negotiations over demarcating the Burmese-Chinese border, at the beginning of one session at Peking while the delegates were just sitting down across the table from each other the senior Chinese negotiator casually observed to the Burmese that his country had developed considerable skill and capacity for handling added increments of population, for according to his calculations the Chinese population increases each year by a sum that is nearly equal to the total Burmese population, and he concluded by saying, "We can in one year make what it has taken you all of history to produce."

Shortly thereafter the Chinese manipulated the Burmese emotions from depression to high elation by suggesting that there was no reason why Hong Kong and the British capitalists should derive all the profits from handling Chinese foreign trade, and that in the future it might be nice if Rangoon were to become the main channel for all trade between the world and an increasingly industrialized China. With such a vision of the future dancing in their minds, and with little regard for the realities of how it might be done, the Burmese were less inclined than ever to provoke in the slightest the Chinese.

The sum effect of Chinese policy has thus been to wear down the resistance of the Burmese to the idea that China must stand in some form of special relationship to Burma. China, by acting in the manner expected of a great and important power, has been able to gain the advantages of great power status without actually realizing all the realities of power. The Burmese, however, have been in no position to test the extent to which the Chinese have been bluffing; they only know that they must make concessions to the left, and appear not to be anti-Communist.

Communist China's policies can only explain in part the drift in Burmese domestic development toward greater isolation from the West and greater commitment to radical socialism. A second important consideration in their development is the state of mind of the military leaders themselves.

When the army assumed power on the first occasion in the fall of 1958, it felt its mission of restoring order and self-respect to the country could be readily realized by eliminating the corrupting and disrupting influences of the civilian politicians. The military concentrated on strengthening the role of the civilian administrators and recreating as best they could the atmosphere of prewar British Burma. The streets were cleaned up, police discipline and public order re-established, and the government offices were made to appear at least to be alert and efficient. Increasingly, however, the army became frustrated as it discovered that correcting surface features and the maintenance of appearances are not enough to bring about fundamental change.

The army sought above all to deal with the economy but it proved completely ineffectual for many reasons, not the least of which were its own exotic notions about economic laws. In the hope of lowering the cost of fish, a main staple of the Burmese diet, the military mobilized the Burma Navy to take over the transportation of fish to the urban centers. This spirit of distrusting middlemen and brokerage operations also inspired the army in its one major success in institution building, that was the building up of the Defense Services Institute (DSI) which was essentially the post exchange organization of the military services, until it became the most important economic

entrepreneur in the country. Initially the DSI established only retail outlets for basic necessities for the civilian population, but after becoming the post exchange for the entire country it kept on growing. Indeed, even after the army had returned the management of the country to civilian hands the DSI continued to expand until it is now the largest business organization in the country with subsidiary concerns in banking, shipping, construction, fishing, department stores, bookstores, bus lines. It is the country's largest importer, controlling trade in coal, coke, and automobiles. The secrets of the phenomenal growth of the DSI were only partly the vigor and authority of the military; it also is blessed by being tax-exempt and by receiving refunds on all duties and fees, ranging from customs to sales tax. Ideologically inclined analysts might be hard put to determine whether the successes of the DSI stemmed from the righteousness of socialism or the pragmatic advantages of the post exchange.

It has been appropriate to dwell in some detail on the Defense Service Institute because it was possibly the most lasting achievement of the first Ne Win government. When the army returned to its barracks after eighteen months of frustrating experience with government, its leading officers constantly mulled over the reasons why they had not been able to cure all the ills of their country when they had supreme power. The failure of the society and economy to gain once again

form and vigor when some of the superficial characteristics of British Burma were recreated suggested that the task of saving Burma called for deeper and more fundamental changes.

The Burmese army out of power gradually convinced itself that it needed to develop and to adhere in practice to some basic ideology. The need for solutions to puzzling and exasperating problems suggested the importance of a simplistic ideology which could become a rigid guide to action. When the army assumed power in October 1958 it had proclaimed a National Ideology which included a special role for the Defense Services, but during its period of rule it had not been able to give much substance to its professed doctrines. Once the army out of power felt it necessary to rethink a national approach it automatically elevated the twin themes of nationalism and socialism. The particular meaning it chose to give them, however, was mainly a reflection of some very basic prejudices of the leading officers.

There was first the prejudice against the politicians who were seen as personally ambitious and hence unworthy spokesmen of the national interest. The army's distrust of the politicians and suspicion that they could not represent the true spirit of Burmese nationalism was stimulated by the concessions which U Nu appeared to be about ready to give to demands for greater autonomy for the Shan states.

In the army's mind the running mates of the politicians were the merchants, who were equally disruptive, unruly, and motivated solely by private gain. Nationalism thus became in the army's mind associated with the need to suppress civilian politicians while socialism became the euphemism for suppressing merchants. Thus when the army finally decided that U Nu's government had again become intolerable its mind was set on creating a form of statism dressed up in nationalist and socialist slogans. It should be added that for all the socialist jargon and rhetoric the army seemed to think that a nationalized economy was in fact the same as a huge PX.

During the first months after the coup d'etat it was not clear how different the second Ne Win government was going to be from the first. Whatever other considerations may have induced changes, there is no doubt but that the incident of Ne Win's ordering his troops to fire upon the students at Rangoon University and then the demolition of the historic Student Union building profoundly affected the approach of the government. For the last decade Rangoon University had become an increasingly unruly and undisciplined center which had all but lost all sense of educational standards. Students customarily bullied faculty and professors felt intimidated and powerless to make any demands of performance on their students. The decline in the university was possibly one of the most severe problems in the entire country, and certainly a firm hand was called for.

This was unmistakably the case in the spring of 1962 when the university authorities' attempt to impose a curfew on the night wanderings of the students stirred up a near-riot. Annoying as the students' behavior was, it was shocking that the government could find no way of coping with the problem except to give orders for troops to fire on the mob of shouting students. The soldiers, according to eyewitnesses, apparently lost their heads after opening fire and in an ill-disciplined fashion chased panicky students into the dormitories where the slaughter continued. Reliable informal estimates place the casualties at 85-95 killed, while some eyewitnesses insist that the more accurate figure must be closer to 130-140. The government claims that slightly under 20 were killed.

General Ne Win soon demonstrated again his rage toward the students when he ordered the Student Union building blown up. This building had been the center of student politics during British rule and the entire generation of nationalist politicians that came out of the university and led the country to independence had freely articulated their anti-government sentiments in its halls. General Ne Win found intolerable the personal attacks by the students which, except for the brutality of related events, might have been judged to have been in bad taste, involving as they did his wife.

This series of incidents had surprisingly little effect on the university. For a time the government closed down the university,

but once it reopened there was no sign that any measures had been taken to improve standards and ensure minimum discipline. The students had won on the particular issue which had triggered off the violence, and the government had capitulated to the extent of giving up the attempt to exert a controlling influence on the campus.

The incidents, however, seem to have affected key army officers who have reacted by becoming increasingly arbitrary and autocratic. Even before the troubles with the students, the army leadership appeared to be somewhat ashamed of the failure of democracy in Burma. The very aggressiveness with which officers asserted the propriety in underdeveloped Burma of employing authoritarian means seems to attest to the fundamental feeling of shame over the course of national development.

Possibly this sense of shame is related to the strong urge of the army leaders to isolate the country and eliminate all sources of outside judgment and appraisal of Burmese performance. This may explain in part the desire of General Ne Win and the army to expel the Ford and Asia foundations from the country and to make it increasingly difficult for foreigners to observe Burmese developments. More recently General Ne Win has insisted on a curtailing of USIS operations in Burma and restricting the movement of USIS officials; the explanation given was that USIS officials were traveling about preaching democracy. There is no evidence that American officials were

recently stressing the theme of democracy; on the other hand, it is possible that the mere presence of Americans can be a reminder to Burmese that their country is no longer committed in the same way as it once was to becoming a Western-style democracy.

Ne Win's effort to take Burma out of the modern world and into an isolated world of its own has not been accomplished without considerable internal strain among the ruling officers. During the first months of the second Ne Win government it was generally assumed that Colonel Aung Gyi was the paramount decision-maker in implementing the army's program. He was the man responsible for the phenomenal growth of the DSI and also for other imaginative innovations during the first period of army rule, such as an elaborate program of Israeli aid to agriculture in the dry zone. Yet shortly after the shooting incident at Rangoon University Aung Gyi began to lose influence, and early in 1963 he was removed from office and made to retire to an isolated rural village. It is impossible to evaluate the reports that Aung Gyi was unable to control gracefully his ambitions; but there is little doubt that some of his colleagues became increasingly irritated by the maturity and balance of his judgment, especially as it contrasted with their emotionalism at the time of the shooting incidents.

Since the retirement of Aung Gyi, the authoritarian trend in Burma has become increasingly notable. For example, although

there is little discipline applied to the university students, the government now apparently requires faculty members to report the details of any conversations with foreigners. There is possibly no regime aside from the totalitarian ones that employs such a threatening form of control over intellectuals and their need to participate in the international community of scholars.

The authoritarian trend in Burma has recently been slightly modified, paradoxically, by the leftward drift: the regime decided to proclaim an amnesty affecting Communist and other insurgents as well as all common criminals. To dramatize the breadth of its amnesty offer, the Revolutionary Council promised publicly that the livelihoods of all prison guards would be protected in spite of the threat of unemployment. Some Rangoon observers cynically suspect that their places will shortly be occupied by merchants and others who will be facing trying times as the government pushes ahead with its determination to nationalize all forms of foreign trade.

Before reaching the conclusion that Burma may be slipping into irreversible associations with the Communist world, it is well to remember that the Burmese have once before escaped what appeared to be an extremely ominous Soviet campaign of penetration. Possibly the Burmese leadership is light-hearted in approaching the Chinese precisely because they are still able to congratulate themselves over their success in slipping from the clutches of the Russians. Some features of the Burmese

method of managing the courting Soviets deserve retelling, not just because they are such an implausible mixture of the Perils of Pauline and a Laurel and Hardy sequence, but mainly because they reveal the Burmese tendency to compromise long-range considerations for the sake of momentary advantage.

The first significant experience the Burmese had in dealing with the Soviet Union was a series of barter agreements beginning in 1954 through which the Burmese hoped to dispose of much of their export rice crop in exchange for consumer as well as capital goods. The Burmese took considerable initial pride in the agreements since they suggested that the new country was not receiving a *dole* but was paying for its economic development. They quickly became disturbed because they found on the one side the Russians reselling the barter rice at discount to Burma's traditional customers, and on the other side they had little influence over the prices the Russians set on the individual items they offered for barter. Crudely the agreements were not only propagandistically but also commercially advantageous for the Russians.

In the fall of 1956, in the wake of the Bulganin and Khrushchev tour of Asia, the Russians offered the Burmese "gifts" of a technical institute, a hospital, hotel, theater, and a cultural and sports center, under terms in which the Burmese would only have to pay the local costs which would involve primarily labor, land sites, and materials locally procurable. The Burmese leaders,

in a passion of generosity and still anxious ideologically not to be the easy recipient of gifts, accepted the Soviet offer on the condition that they be allowed to give the Russians counter-gifts of rice equal in value to the external costs of the Russian contributions. We have no record as to how amazed the Russians may have been by this development, but we do know that "Soviet Gifts" soon became one of the largest items of current expenditure in the Burmese budget, and that gradually more and more Burmese came to realize that their country was in essence underwriting the entire costs of the so-called Soviet gifts.

The Burmese official reaction was to redouble their suspicions of the Russians and to become inordinately obstinate in all their subsequent negotiations over the actual construction of the "gift" projects. The Burmese approach is possibly best brought out in the policies toward the hotel. The Soviets indicated that they had in mind the erection of a modern, cosmopolitan hotel which would be fully airconditioned and a wonder of the Southeast Asia tourist circuit. The Burmese instincts of discretion and good taste were strong enough to make them realize that most Western visitors to Rangoon would find the idea of staying at the "Burmese-Soviet Friendship Hotel" most repulsive. Very tactfully the Burmese suggested that the Russians change their plans and, in a sincere demonstration of respect

for the spirit underlying Burmese culture, build instead a modest and appropriately austere hostelry for itinerant Buddhist monks who might be visiting Burmese from other lands.

Again we do not know the Russian reactions, but the record suggests that they were able to meet the test of control and self-discipline which is the ultimate mark of the good Leninist. They finally agreed to build a compromise hotel in a relatively isolated part of the city. Possibly sensing a victory in gamesmanship and still smarting from the absurd outcome of their initial negotiation tactics, the Burmese erected a large sign which, in identifying the hotel construction as a "Soviet gift," went on to note that the labor was being provided by a rehabilitation battalion of former Communist insurgents and that the Union government was deeply appreciative of the Russian assistance in helping to "bring back into the light" men who had so fallen on evil ways.

Eventually overcoming these and other frustrations, the Russians completed the hotel only to learn that the Burmese had other plans as to who should manage its operations. Once again, we regretfully do not know what the Russian reaction was when they learned that the Burmese contemplated having Pan-American Airways run the hotel. In the end the Burmese settled on the Israeli government as the most favored inn-keepers. The Russians never completed all the proposed projects, and in general became bored with trying to do business with the Burmese.

As we suggested, this experience may have left the Burmese with an unfounded sense of confidence in their abilities to successfully cope with the cold war. It would only be tedious to relate the equally implausible story of how the Burmese resisted American overtures of friendship and good will. The important conclusion is only that the Burmese were indeed so successful in frustrating both the Russians and the West that they ended up safely assured that neither of the great powers would willingly help Burma with its basic problems of economic development.

Now the Burmese seem prepared to enter a second round of seeking assistance from the Communist world. In January 1961, during Premier Chou En-lai's goodwill visit, the Chinese offered the Burmese an \$84 million aid program, and in May 1963, announcement was made that this aid would consist of some thirteen projects, including hydroelectric plants, bridges, sugar mills, and textile and plywood factories. Significantly, except for the plywood factory to be built in Rangoon, all the projects are designed to "assist regional economic development." Indeed, in moving away from the old centers of Burmese development, the decision seems to have been to go all the way to the other extreme and build along the Chinese border. Two bridges are to be built across the Salween River to facilitate trade between Yunnan province of Communist China and the North Shan State. Eventually there is also to be a road built in the remote Wa state which also borders on Communist China. Again, before reading too much

that is ominous into these agreements, it should be noted that before the Chinese technicians begin to arrive in Burma there is still much negotiation that must be done over the details of plans, and the record indicates that while the Burmese may be quick to yield on principles they can be very sticky on details, and therefore the program, like most aid to Burma programs, may never be completely consummated.

In replacing Russia with China as the source of aid, the Burmese also seem prepared to change some of their ways; but unfortunately in seeking to gain more constructive results the Burmese seem willing this time to lower their guard as far as "keeping the cold war out of their country" is concerned. They have apparently decided to cooperate more sympathetically with their benefactors. One can never be sure what lesson the Burmese may learn from any experience, but it is not unlikely that they are on the verge of proudly learning the wrong one.

There is also the question of whether Western policy makers can learn the right lessons from this record of Burmese affairs. Hopefully any sober survey of our experiences would include detailed reflections on at least the following matters.

First, frustrated soldiers who feel that they may be failing to achieve the legitimate goals of national development can be peculiarly dangerous in the contemporary world. The compelling need of the military to be active, which can make them useful modernizers under certain conditions, can also make them

reckless guardians of the national destiny if all is not going well. Instead of being a vital stabilizing element and the ultimate defense against communism, the military can, when frustrated by other solutions, become surprisingly closely associated with the Communists. The gap between etatism, especially when bolstered by an ideological mixture of nationalism and socialism, and communism is not very great. Therefore soldiers, just as civilian politicians, can be driven to toying with communism when beset with fears of probable failure.

A second general conclusion is that the United States still has not found ways of accurately and persistently communicating the realities of its tremendous power potential into the more distant lands of the world. In the nebulous but absolutely crucial realm of estimating the facts of international power, the leaders of the newly emergent states can find it extraordinarily difficult to judge what weights should be attached to American power. The disturbing theme in our story is that the Chinese were far more effective than the Americans in communicating power to the Burmese, and this is not just a factor of geographical propinquity. Somehow within the Burmese context China had become the great power whose every whim must be heeded and whose potential wrath and disdain had to be avoided. The United States on the other hand was merely a distant, rich, possibly goodwilled, but certainly marginally effective power, who, in spite of an exaggerated sense

of self-importance, could be discounted when serious matters of national policy had to be settled. This was the mark of the success of Chinese diplomacy and of the failure of American diplomacy.

The problem seems to be that a widening gap has developed between the authority and the authoritativeness of American policy on the one hand, and the realities of American power, both economic and military, on the other hand. The leaders of the new countries know, of course, in general terms the tremendous power and wealth of the United States, but these facts are not translated into anything meaningful for the conduct of day-to-day activities. What has happened is that the contemporary revolution in the world order which has undermined the classical international system has destroyed to a large degree the sense of authority which historically was always associated with great power status. In the prewar world, British authority, for example, was readily deferred to in many parts of the world without the British having to prove at every turn that they did in fact have the necessary military and economic power to back up their authority.

In a strange fashion the mystique of revolution, the mumbo-jumbo of Marxism-Leninism, and the elemental awe that goes with actually confronting the distant, the unlikely, and the supposedly sinful have all attributed to giving the Communists a far greater sense of authority than their actual power would warrant. In

Burma, at every turn the Chinese were treated as heavy-weights, while the Americans, when not ignored, were taken as light-weights. Something is profoundly wrong when, in a country where the per capita income has declined from nearly \$100 just before the war to a mere \$53 at present, where over the same period of time the population has increased 43 per cent and the gross domestic product only 11 per cent, the head of state feels that it is unimportant even to talk with the American ambassador.

Unquestionably in the new world order that we exist in the United States has sought to find more effective ways of building up an appropriate sense of American authority. Our various attempts to assert the American presence by maintaining large embassies and much of our foreign aid programs, whether they take the form of impact projects or systematic development programs, are in a vague way directed to this problem of communicating the authority of the United States. This is why it is so doubly frustrating to have any of our aid program become hamstrung by a morass of administrative confusion, for instead of communicating power and competence on the international scene we only demonstrated ineffectualness.

Let us make it clear that we are not discussing the problem of the "limits of American power" and the dangers of taking on more commitments than we have the ability or the resources to back. There is no question about the relative superiority of United States power, and no one questions that we have more

military and economic power than would be assumed from our impotence in authority. We are talking about the responses of foreign governments to our image of authority and the fact that they can so easily and so impishly ignore the realities of our actual power.

Much of the difficulty, of course, arises from the fact that we are dealing with societies in transition, which lack stable institutions, and in which there is little sense of authority on the part of any presumed power holders. The giving and receiving of cues as to the appropriate demands of deference are not well established, and all forms of leadership must work at the margin of impotence. This last year, at the May Day celebration, in the midst of General Ne Win's address to the nation nearly a third to a half of his audience drifted away, and nobody could be sure whether to interpret this behavior as an insult to the head of state or merely as an example of customary Burmese bad manners and roaming restlessness. In terms of the international scene, the task of building up a sense of authority will, unfortunately, probably call for more frequent and more naked use of power than a society such as the United States feels comfortable in using. Certainly the test of American diplomacy at present is our ability to create a more appropriate and accurate understanding of our national authority so that it will be less and less necessary for us to have to resort to cold power and decisive force.

This is particularly important in the light of a third conclusion, which is that the hour may have already passed when it was possible and useful to try to induce the Burmese not to move too closely in association with the Communist world. We may have already passed into the time when attention and effort must be shifted to the objective of deterring the Chinese from exploiting the openings which the Burmese have offered them. It would be exceedingly regretful if in fact such a point has been reached, for this would mean that we have gone beyond the stage in which American policy could properly be guided by the overall objectives of helping the Burmese realize their national development, and have entered a stage in which Burma must be treated increasingly as a function of American relations with Communist China. This might not be so serious for America, but it would signal the bankruptcy of Burma's policies, for she would then be in spite of herself a hapless victim of the cold war.